The Examined Life

Examining... The Philosopy of Culture

Supplementary Quotes

The particular individual, so far as content is concerned, has also to go through the stages through which the general mind has passed, but as shapes once assumed by mind and now laid aside, as stages of a road which has been worked over and levelled out. Hence it is that, in the case of various kinds of knowledge, we find that what in former days occupied the energies of men of mature mental ability sinks to the level of information, exercises, and even pastimes, for children; and in this educational progress we can see the history of the world's culture delineated in faint outline. This bygone mode of existence has already become an acquired possession of the general mind, which constitutes the substance of the individual, and, by thus appearing externally to him, furnishes his inorganic nature. In this respect culture or development of mind (*Bildung*), regarded from the side of the individual, consists in his acquiring what lies at his hand ready for him, in making its inorganic nature organic to himself, and taking possession of it for himself. Looked at, however, from the side of universal mind *qua* general spiritual substance, culture means nothing else than that this substance gives itself its own self-consciousness, brings about its own inherent process and its own reflection into self.
— *Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit (1807)*

Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking.
— *Marx, German Ideology (1845)*

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.
— *Marx, German Ideology (1845)*

"It sounds like a fairy-tale, but not only that; this story of what man by his science and practical inventions has achieved on this earth, where he first appeared as a weakly member of the animal kingdom, and on which each individual of his species must ever again appear as a helpless infant... is a direct fulfilment of all, or of most, of the dearest wishes in his fairy-tales. All these possessions he has acquired through culture. Long ago he formed an ideal conception of omnipotence and omniscience which he embodied in his gods. Whatever seemed unattainable to his desires - or forbidden to him - he attributed to these gods. One may say, therefore, that these gods were the ideals of his culture. Now he has himself approached very near to realizing this ideal, he has nearly become a god himself. But only, it is true, in the way that ideals are usually realized in the general experience of humanity. Not completely; in some respects not at all, in others only by halves. Man has become a god by means of artificial limbs, so to speak, quite magnificent when equipped with all his accessory organs; but they do not grow on him and they still give him trouble at times... Future ages will produce further great advances in this realm of culture, probably inconceivable now, and will increase man's likeness to a god still more."
— *Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents*

"One thing only do I know for certain and that is that man's judgments of value follow directly his wishes for happiness-that, accordingly, they are an attempt to support his illusions with arguments. "
— *Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents*

The development of human life is not everywhere the same but rather takes form in an extraordinary diversity of societies and civilizations. This intellectual, aesthetic and sociological diversity is in no way the outcome of the biological differences, in certain observable features, between different groups of men; it is simply a parallel phenomenon in a different sphere.
— *Lévi-Strauss, Claude. Race, History and Culture. 1996.*

If our arguments are valid, there is not, and never can be, a world civilization in the absolute sense in which that term is often used, since civilization implies, and indeed consists in, the coexistence of cultures exhibiting the maximum possible diversities. A world civilization could, in fact, represent no more than a worldwide coalition of cultures, each of which would preserve its own originality.
— *Lévi-Strauss, Claude. Race, History and Culture. 1996.*

In man, there's already a crack, a profound perturbation of the regulation of life. That's the importance of the notion introduced by Freud of the death instinct. Not that the death instinct is such an enlightening notion in itself. What has to be comprehended is that he was forced to introduce it so as to remind us of a salient fact of his experience just when it was beginning to get lost.
— *Lacan, Jacques and Sylvana Tomaselli (Translator). Seminar II. 1954-55.*

It would be very easy to prove to you that the machine is much freer than the animal. The animal is a jammed machine. It's a machine with certain parameters that are no longer capable of variation. And why? Because the external environment determines the animal, and turns it into a fixed type.
— *Lacan, Jacques and Sylvana Tomaselli (Translator). Seminar II. 1954-55.*

“There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations”
— *Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*

“Visibility is a trap.”
— *Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*

"I think we've been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the government's job to cope with it. 'I have a problem, I'll get a grant.' 'I'm homeless, the government must house me.' They're casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations. There's no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation."
— Margaret Thatcher

“Cinema is the ultimate pervert art. It doesn't give you what you desire - it tells you how to desire.”
— *Slavoj Žižek*

“Beyond the fiction of reality, there is the reality of the fiction.”
— *Slavoj Žižek, Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*

“It is the ultimate irony of history that radical individualism serves as the ideological justification of the unconstrained power of what the large majority of individuals experience as a vast anonymous power, which, without any democratic public control, regulates their lives.”
— *Slavoj Žižek, Demanding the Impossible*